



News Release

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Hundreds of Utah Pets Killed Each Year to Test for Rabies *World Rabies Day is Sept. 8 – Utahns Urged to Vaccinate Pets*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – In 2006, more than 350 unvaccinated dogs and cats were euthanized to be tested for rabies. In Utah, bats are the primary carrier of the rabies virus, but other wild animals like raccoons, skunks and foxes are considered high risk as well.

Anytime a pet catches, plays with, or even touches a bat or other high risk animal, there is a risk of rabies being spread to the pet. Animals that are current on their rabies vaccine are isolated for 10 days and then given a booster shot. Because it takes time for the disease to become apparent, pets that do not have a current rabies vaccine are either euthanized or held at an approved facility for 6 months—which can cost the owner thousands of dollars.

The Utah Departments of Health and Agriculture and Food urge all Utahns to avoid the heartache of euthanizing pets by assuring their rabies vaccines are up-to-date. The Humane Society of Utah and some local veterinary clinics offer low cost rabies shots. Utah law requires all domestic dogs, cats and ferrets to receive the rabies vaccine.

Worldwide, at least 55,000 people die from rabies each year, and many are children under age 15. Most of the deaths occur in undeveloped countries that do not have routine vaccination of domestic animals, especially dogs. In the U. S., an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 people are exposed to rabies—usually through contact with wild animals, but also through unvaccinated dogs and cats—and must undergo a series of injections to prevent the deadly disease. Rabies prevention starts with the animal owner.

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State Veterinarian L. Earl Rogers, DVM, says pet owners should contact their veterinarian if they have any questions about rabies or the vaccine.

“It’s also important that campers and hikers never approach wild animals for any reason,” said UDOH epidemiologist JoDee Summers, “because you can’t always tell when one is rabid. Even healthy-looking animals can have rabies, and they don’t foam at the mouth like you used to see in old movies,” Summers said.

In fact, a wild animal infected with rabies may even appear tame and approachable. In domestic animals, signs of rabies include:

- behavior changes
- general sickness
- trouble swallowing
- an increase in drool or saliva
- biting at everything if excited

For more information visit <http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/rabies/index.html>. Pet owners should ask their local veterinary clinic about the availability of low cost rabies vaccine.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.